

Press Release

Immediate Release

Topic: Unwary Cooks Can Contaminate Their Own Food
Date: September 12, 2000
Contact: Kelly Shannon, 601/576-7667

Food safety experts ask Mississippians to sharpen their skills and know-how when handling and preparing food in both home and commercial kitchens. September marks National Food Safety Education Month, an annual observance focused on food safety with this year's theme as "Be Smart. Keep Foods Apart – Don't Cross Contaminate."

Department of Health Food Protection Director Charlene Bruce said, "Most consumers have developed a good foundation of food safety knowledge. Yet consumers still face confusion about cross-contamination, and this confusion increases the risk of foodborne illness."

Cross-contamination is the transfer of harmful bacteria to food from other foods, cutting boards, utensils, if they are not handled properly. An example of cross-contamination is cutting raw meat or poultry on a cutting board and then slicing salad vegetables on the same cutting board without washing the cutting board between uses.

Mississippi Department of Health participates along with other federal, state, and local government agencies and the food industry to heighten awareness about the importance of food safety education and encourage food safety training for all industry employees during the month-long observance.

Mike Cashion of the Mississippi Restaurant Association agrees that partnerships focus attention on safe food handling and preparation.

"Working together with those involved in promoting food safety education gives us all the opportunity to encourage the restaurant and hospitality industry to take food safety seriously," said Cashion. "This annual food safety initiative promotes our industry's commitment to serving safe food to all Mississippians."

Food Safety – Add 1

A 1998 Food and Drug Administration and United States.

Department of Agriculture national consumer food survey showed that 21 percent of main meal cooks do not wash their cutting boards after cutting raw meat; one quarter of main meal cooks do not wash their hands after handling raw meat and fish; two-thirds do not wash their hands after handling raw eggs; and 61 percent of people who use a cloth or sponge to wipe kitchen counters change them less than seven times per week.

“We must remember that cross-contamination can result from all stages of food preparation -- personal hygiene, cleaning, storage, preparation and cooking and most importantly, serving,” said Bruce. “Although bacteria can lurk in our kitchens, we have four powerful tools to fight bacteria: washing hands and surfaces often, avoiding cross-contamination, cooking to proper temperatures, and refrigerating promptly.”

Bruce suggests some helpful hints for preventing cross-contamination while working in the kitchen:

T Always wash hands with hot, soapy water after handling raw meat, poultry, seafood, eggs, or fresh fruits and vegetables;

T Wash cutting boards, dishes, and utensils with hot, soapy water after they come in contact with raw meat, poultry, seafood, eggs, or fresh fruits and vegetables;

T Keep raw meat, poultry, seafood, as well as eggs – and the juices from raw foods – away from other foods in your shopping cart, on kitchen counters, and in your refrigerator.

T Never place cooked food back on the same plate or cutting board that previously held raw food without washing the plate or cutting board between uses.

T If possible, use one cutting board for fresh produce and a different one for raw meat, poultry, and seafood;

T Do not use sauce that was used to marinate raw meat, poultry, or seafood on cooked food unless you boil the sauce first.

Mississippians who want to know more about food safety can call their local county health department or the FDA Food Information Line at 1-888-SAFEFOOD. To obtain materials and find out more about National Food Safety Education Month, anyone can log onto the International Food Safety Council’s web site at www.foodsafetycouncil.org.

kas:9/12/00